



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
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December 10, 2002

**TO:** Washington State Board of Health Members  
**FROM:** Craig McLaughlin, Senior Health Policy Manager  
**RE:** **POSSIBLE USE OF BOARD RESOURCES TO PLAN JOINT CONFERENCE**

**Background and Summary**

At its October 9 meeting, the Board learned that Executive Director Don Sloma had been voted in as president-elect of the Washington State Public Health Association. A customary duty of the president-elect is to chair the planning committee for the Joint Conference on Health (JCH). The ranks of past WSPHA president-elects include a former Board executive director and various Department of Health (DOH) assistant secretaries. Historically, they have treated JCH planning as part of their state official duties. In the performance of those duties, they have made *de minimis* use of state resources such as e-mail and computers to support JCH- and WSPHA-related activities.

The purpose of this memo is to provide brief background about some of the legal, ethical, historical and policy implications of performing such activity on state time and using state resources. The takeaway point, however, is that performance of JCH planning activities on Board of Health time would appear to be appropriate if and only if pre-authorized by the Board. Staff is recommending that the Board discuss whether it considers conference planning to be an appropriate use of Board resources and formally provide appropriate direction to *all* staff (if the executive director becomes heavily involved in conference planning and coordination, it would be likely to affect the duties of other staff members).

**Recommended Board Action**

The Board should discuss whether it would be appropriate and desirable to incorporate planning for the Joint Conference on Health explicitly into the official duties of the executive director and other Board staff. It may choose to adopt a resolution such as the following:

***The Board finds that it has an interest in supporting and promoting the Joint Conference on Health consistent with its authority and mission, and it authorizes Board staff to include such support and promotion in their official duties.***

## **Discussion**

When weighing whether to authorize JCH planning by the executive director and other staff, Board members may want to consider the following points:

- The Board's authorizing statute, Chapter 43.20 RCW, states that one of the charges of the Board is "to explore ways to improve the health status of the citizenry." The Joint Conference on Health is the single largest statewide gathering where public health professionals engage in such exploration.
- The Board has a long history of involvement with the conference. Staff members and Board members regularly prepare and deliver presentations at the conference. The Board has frequently been a co-sponsor of the conference. It also times its October meeting to coincide with the conference and encourages Board members and policy staff to attend.
- The Department of Health helped develop the current combined format of the conference, serves as a co-sponsor, and acts as a financial guarantor. Each year, DOH staff is heavily involved in its planning and execution.
- At its October meeting, the Board adopted Policy 02-005, which encouraged Board staffers "to participate on behalf of the Board or any of its individual members in collaborative efforts with federal, state and local government agencies, with private organizations, associations or other groups so long as their participation serves primarily to advance an expressed interest or objective of the Board." Producing any work products on behalf of another group would require that "these products have been approved for completion by the Board or by the Executive Director after consultation with at least one Board member."
- It is a standing practice of the Board to defer to DOH policies and procedures in the absence of a specific Board policy. The DOH Ethics Policy (#07.015) section on "occasional but limited use of state resources" states that "it shall be permitted for DOH employees who serve as unpaid, volunteer workers or board members for organizations whose functions are supportive of the mission statement of the Department of Health to make *de minimis* use of state resources."
- A previous DOH whistleblower complaint challenged the use of state e-mail and phone number by an assistant secretary on behalf of WSPHA. An investigation by a DOH internal auditor found it to be a non-issue because: (1) the assistant secretary was not making money from WSPHA; (2) since WSPHA is a public health organization, work on its behalf complemented the assistant secretary's official duties; and (3) the use of state resources was *de minimis*.
- The planners for the 2003 conference anticipate using the new IOM report, *The Future of Public Health*, as a starting point. A likely theme is "expanding partnerships." The IOM report (attached) is consistent in many respects with the Board's recent work and current priority projects. The notion of expanding partnerships is consistent with the current focus of work being conducted by two Board committees—Environmental Health and Access.

Attachments